

**Mountain Home Aquifer Working Group
of the
Expanded Natural Resources Legislative Interim Committee
Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room
160 South 3rd East
Mountain Home, Idaho 83647
September 14, 2004**

Attendees: Chairman: Representative Bert Stevenson
Committee members: Representatives Doug Jones, Representative Peter Nielsen
Members of the public: Sign-up sheet available from Legislative Services Offices

Presenters: Brian Patton, Project Engineer, Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR)
David Blew, Recharge Coordinator, IDWR
Gary Spackman, IDWR

Chairman Bert Stevenson called to order the meeting of the Mountain Home Aquifer Working Group at 9:43 a.m. on Tuesday, September 14, 2004, in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room. The first order of business was to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Representative Nielsen moved to approve the minutes of July 16, 2004. Representative Jones seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.

The working group is exploring water supply and management options in the Mountain Home area. Brian Patton and David Blew, IDWR, gave a power point presentation entitled “Mountain Home Area Water Supply Projects.” Handouts were provided. Gary Spackman, also IDWR, then briefly contrasted the criteria for designating a critical ground water management area and a ground water management area.

In their presentation, Patton and Blew offered preliminary estimates relating to the Bennett Creek Pipeline and Little Camas Canal Lining projects. Blew, IDWR recharge coordinator, said the only way recharge can really work in Mountain Home is to import water into the basin or address canal losses from the three reservoirs - Little Camas, Long Tom and Mountain Home Reservoir- in the system located there. He and Patton emphasized that all of the options listed below are preliminary estimates and more detailed feasibility studies would be required before any project is undertaken.

Bennett Creek Pipeline would move surface water from Bennett Creek to Mountain Home to offset pumping from Mountain Home Aquifer. Brian Patton, an IDWR project engineer, estimated it would cost \$2,600,000 or \$913/acre/feet (AF) to build a pipeline that could deliver 2,847 acre/feet (AF), the average system fill at Bennett Creek Reservoir. This does not include the cost of acquiring the reservoirs, annual operation and maintenance, or on-farm delivery modifications. Any additional reservoir capacity could be used to store carry-over if there is any.

Little Camas Canal Lining. David Blew outlined four potential options to address canal losses that include canal lining or a combination of canal lining and a pipeline.

<u>Canal Lining</u>	<u>Pipeline 1</u>	<u>Pipeline 2</u>	<u>Canal & Pipeline</u>
Length: 10.64 miles	2.7 miles	2.3 miles	Line - 3.5 miles
	Replaces 6.5 miles of canal	Replaces 5.2 miles of canal	Pipeline - 2.7 miles
Cost: \$3.4 million	\$1.3 million	\$1.1 million	\$3.4 million
Acft Saved at 30% loss: 3665	2585	1875	3790
Cost/Acft Saved: \$928/AF	\$503/AF	\$587/AF	\$897/AF

In discussing these options, a number of concerns were expressed:

1. **Cost.** The primary funding for these projects will come from local people. With an estimated 4,423 acres and 140 shareholders, the cost would be prohibitive to the Mountain Home Irrigation District and shareholders said it would be hard convincing anyone else to cost share. It was suggested that, with a proper education campaign, the community might be convinced to share the costs.
2. **Delivery.** Even if more water is available, there's a limit as to how much water can be delivered at any time through the current system. However, an increased supply should extend the irrigation season which should, in turn, reduce pumping.
3. **Recharge.** Losses in the lower elevation are probably a source of recharge.

On-going Canal Lining Experiment. Calvin Ireland, Mountain Home Irrigation District, reported that the district is experimenting with the use of a long-strand polymer to line the canal and will receive an evaluation of its effectiveness later this year. If it's working, the process is relatively cheap and may be a good alternative to these other options. In response to questions from Representative Jones, the district is improving its measuring and monitoring efforts, but it's difficult to gauge the amount of water in the system's tunnels and feeder streams. Representative Nielsen observed that the current system should be tuned up and used to the fullest extent.

Critical Ground Water Management Area and Ground Water Management Area Designations. At the Chairman's request, Gary Spackman, IDWR, contrasted the designation of a critical ground water management area (Section 42-233a, *Idaho Code*) with a ground water management area (Section 42-233b, *Idaho Code*). After reading the definition for each from *Idaho Code*, Spackman said there isn't a lot of difference between the two. A ground water management area may be approaching the conditions necessary for a critical ground water management area, but there is still some uncertainty.

What is important are the requirements to make a designation and what the Department is doing. Referencing IDWR's files, Spackman said historically the earliest designations around the state were almost solely critical ground water management areas based on alarming declines in ground water levels. The critical ground water management area designation may have led to a public perception that there was no opportunity for flexible management.

While there is not a significant distinction in the way a water right is processed, the difference between the two designations is how an application is reviewed for approval by the Director. The law implies a more individual review of an application in a critical ground water management area and tighter criteria for approval.

In Mountain Home, IDWR designated both a critical ground water management area and a ground water management area in Mountain Home within a one-year period. Questions were raised about the possibility of extending the critical ground water management area here and either designation's impact on potential development and domestic use.

Working group members were asked if the legislature will consider making new applications more restrictive under Section 42-111, *Idaho Code* (Domestic Purposes Defined). Legislative leaders are meeting with city and county representatives to discuss domestic use. Each working group will make recommendations to the Expanded Natural Resources Interim Committee. While various ideas and projects are being discussed, there is nothing on paper at this time. Anything proposed as legislation would be discussed in both chambers of the legislature and public hearings before adoption. Additional money will be required to staff agencies and fund projects.

The issues in Mountain Home are not unique to the community or Idaho. Not only is this a statewide issue, but they exist across the entire country. Hope was expressed that the legislature will allow local people to address and administer the issue locally as much as possible, perhaps through planning & zoning commissions.

The next meeting is scheduled for **October 13, 2004**, at **9:30 a.m.** in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room.

There being no further business before the working group, the meeting adjourned at approximately 11:05 a.m.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Copies of the maps, studies and handouts are available to the public on the IDWR website at www.idwr.state.id.us/Committee

Meeting notices, agendas and minutes are available to the public at <http://www2.state.id.us/legislat/legislat.html>.

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